EMC News

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ACCEPTING NOMINATIONS FOR EMC CHAIR
Submitted by Heather Filiberto

The Nominating Committee will be accepting nominations for the 2005 EMC chairperson until December 8th. Please forward nomination (self nominations included) or any questions to any of the following committee members:
Kenny Christainson - Kennyc@ithaca.edu
Neha Khana - nkhanna@binghamton.edu
Steve Uzmann - Steveathillview@aol.com

WATER MONITORING COMMITTEE 2004 REPORT
Submitted by Roger Yonkin

Progress has been slow, probably due to efforts to run without a Chairman. Members have come back to examining the purpose of this committee several times. Discussion on our report has led to these points it might contain:

- A list of methods by which the county could determine the quality of Cayuga Lake water at any time.
- A compilation of data gathered to date by various means and bodies.
- A list of flora and fauna that should be of particular concern.
- How to obtain a database against which to compare water quality in the future.
- A method by which appropriate water samples could be gathered and stored for future reference.
- What other municipalities/groups are doing?
- A combination of all or part of the above.

In 2005, we expect to further discuss our purpose, examine how specific our recommendations to the County should be, and sets goals with a timeline for project completion.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW COMMITTEE 2004 REPORT
Submitted by Steve Uzmann

The Environmental Review Committee had a quiet year. We did not meet until August due to a lack of any items to consider. We then agreed to be the committee for review of the Public Safety Communications System (Towers) projects as they came up, since the original EMC committee for this had disbanded. We reviewed and sent comments on the monopole replacement tower at Ithaca College. We then reviewed the 55-lot subdivision proposed in Danby adjacent to Buttermilk Creek and sent comments and suggestions regarding its potential impact on the creek. We crafted a letter to the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation regarding our opposition to Cornell's proposal to reduce the number of Lake Source Cooling project water quality monitoring stations from 8 to 2, in advance of their SPEDES permit schedule. Excerpts of this letter were also released to the local press. We continue to watch and remain concerned about the inn and marina project (Remington Inn) proposed for construction near the LSC plant on Cayuga Lake.

EDUCATION COMMITTEE 2004 REPORT
Submitted by Steve Nicholson

While we only met once officially this year, members have been active through email. Our annual Earthday table featured a group of students and faculty from Ithaca College, who ran an Ecological Footprint café, showing customers how their orders for energy, food, and material goods were unsustainable and could not be filled. Ice cream was served as a reward for participation.

The Environmental Directory was updated this summer by a Planning Department intern. We hope to publish it early next year.

Work on the UNA protocols continues.

We prepared a PowerPoint presentation about burn barrels, and with the help of an *ad h*oc committee, we introduced to the EMC resolution 2-2004. This recommends that Tompkins County ban open burning of household solid waste. The resolution passed 8-3, and will be presented to the County Legislature's Planning, Development, and Environmental Quality Committee on December 1.

There were three highway cleanups on our adopted stretch of State Route 13. Attendance was generally poor and predictable. The Golden Hard Hat award will be relatively uncontested this year.

See you at the next EMC meeting!
December 8th at 7:00pm
Transit Center
Members: Remember to notify the Chair if you will be absent!
Steve Nicholson, 539-6923 or scnfish@clarityconnect.com

ENERGY COMMITTEE 2004 REPORT
Submitted by Kenny Christianson

The Energy Committee remained active in 2004, continuing its mission of advising the County Legislature on energy issues and advocating for alternative energy sources at the local and state levels. The primary accomplishment of the committee in 2004 was Resolution 2004-1, supporting a five percent renewable energy standard for County operations, which the County Legislature adopted in August. The County has now committed to using renewable electricity sources for five percent of its electricity consumption by 2008. Two percent of the County's electricity is already generated through the Library solar panels, so the County will then have to purchase three percent of its electricity from renewable sources, or approximately 250,000 KwH per year.

The committee also sponsored an energy conference in conjunction with Earth Day in April. Representatives from Community Energy, Ithaca College, Sustainable Tompkins, the EMC, and Co-opPlus Energy Cooperative discussed the benefits and challenges of energy conservation, composting, and bringing alternative energy sources to Tompkins County. The conference provided a starting point for exploring ways of combining local resources in a community-wide effort to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

In response to the Library solar panel shading issue, the committee provided comments on the final proposal between the City of Ithaca and Tompkins County. The committee will continue to monitor the Library solar panels and the County's efforts at reducing greenhouse gas emissions through the International Council on Local Environmental Initiatives' Cities for Climate Protection Campaign. The County continues to devote real dollars ($50,000 in 2004) and staff time to reducing its climate change impacts. The committee will continue to advise and support the County in these efforts.

Finally, the committee is exploring a public relations campaign to get individuals to commit to the ten percent challenge, a program of Environmental Advocates of New York, where households pledge to reduce their energy use by ten percent. Also, the committee is researching consumer energy alternatives in response to NYSEG's second "Voice your Choice" program. The committee plans to keep the public informed of its results.

AQUIFER PROTECTION, BIODIVERSITY AND STORMWATER MANAGEMENT
Submitted by Steve Nicholson

Many of us are concerned and involved with these issues, but as a species, our efforts pale in comparison to the Beaver. Once almost extinct, their rapid comeback has been underappreciated. “The ecological role or beaver is tremendous,” says Stewart Breck, a research biologist with Wildlife Services, an arm of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Riparian zones, one of the richest and most diverse types of habitat, account for just 2 percent of landscapes, yet they provide 80 percent of wildlife with habitat at some point in their lives.

One familiar beaver activity is dam-building, which raises the elevation of water in the stream as well as the adjacent groundwater. Despite beavers’ reputation for causing flooding, their marshes help buffer adjacent landscapes against the effects of flash floods. Instead of streambank erosion, sediment is deposited. This additional riparian vegetation creates more and better habitat for many species.

Water is reoxygenated as it falls over beaver dams. It percolates back into the stream during low-flow periods, increasing water in the channel and thereby providing more for downstream uses, and recharging the underground aquifer. Water that normally flushes through a river corridor in a single day will pass through beaver-inhabited environments in seven to ten days.

Beavers work 24/7 for free, naturally restoring stream-banks and watersheds. We should encourage land-owners to increase beaver populations by allowing property tax abatements for parcels occupied by these important animals.

From the National Parks Conservation Association: Considered functionally extinct at the beginning of the 20th century, beavers have made a dramatic comeback across the United States and Canada – good news for beavers as well as other species. The large industrious rodents create wetlands and marshy areas that provide habitat for hundreds of species. The near-elimination of beavers led to a drying of wetlands and an expansion of meadows and forests to the detriment of marshy species. Beavers, Smith says, are boons for species diversity.

Despite beavers’ reputation for causing flooding, their marshes actually help buffer adjacent landscapes against the effects of flash floods. Their network of channels, dams, and sloughs slows the water as it moves through a drainage, holds water in the landscape longer, insulates areas from drought, and recharges underground aquifers.

Among the biggest beneficiaries of beaver presence are moose, mink, and muskrat; numerous bird species including songbirds, wading birds, waterfowl, and raptors; as well as amphibians, reptiles, aquatic insects, and, of course, fish that thrive in slow-moving water. Beaver ponds and dams function as water filters that capture silt and pollutants, leaving water heading downstream cleaner.

EPA InfoHabitat Improvement—Leave It to Beavers
What Beavers Do Best